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Predicting identity style based on family communication pattern in young males

Azadeh Soltani^a *, Samaneh Hosseini^b, Mohammad Mahmoodi^a^a M.A in Clinical Psychology, Shiraz University, Iran^b M.A in Clinical Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Science and research branch, fars, Iran

Abstract

This research shows the role of family communication pattern in predicting identity styles. One of the main topics in social psychology and characteristic in the recent decade is the Identity. On the other hand, family is the first system that a kid is placed in, affected by and his identity formed. Based on this reason, this research is looking for the role of family communication pattern in identity processing style in young males. For this purpose 345 male students were selected with the average age of 21/05 ($\pm 2/02$) among the students of different colleges of Shiraz University with simple random sampling. All of the participants completed Revised Family Communication Pattern (RFCP) instrument (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994) and Identity Style Inventory (ISI) (White, Wampler & Winn, 1998). RFCP has two orientations: Conversation Orientation and Conformity Orientation. Also ISI has three styles: Normative, Informational and Diffuse-avoidant Styles. The result of multiple regressions shows that the conversation orientation of communication pattern in family predicts normative and informational styles positively. Also conformity orientation of communication pattern in family predicts diffuse-avoidant style positively.

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1. Introduction

One of the main topics in social psychology and characteristics in the recent decade is the Identity. Erikson (1968) viewed identity as built upon childhood identifications but as being more than the sum of these. The process of identity formation is described as being built upon the childhood processes of introjections and identifications - that during childhood individuals incorporate their parents' image (or other significant relations) and their roles, values, and beliefs. Thus future identity formation depends on such introjections and identifications. Also Erikson stresses that all the necessary ingredients for an identity are not present until adolescence and it is at that point in life, that great physiological and cognitive changes coincide with the growing social expectations. Berzonsky (1990) highlights that identity development is considered to involve an ongoing dialectical interchange between assimilative processes governed by the identity structure (explained below) and accommodative processes directed by the social and physical contexts within which adolescents live and develop.

Berzonsky (1989, 1990) delineated three primary identity styles- Informational, Normative, and Diffuse/avoidant- with which individuals approach the identity versus the role confusion crisis. People with the

* Corresponding author name. Tel.: +98-0917-711-6360

E-mail address: ailin200460@yahoo.com

informational identity style are introspective and engage in a great deal of exploration, actively seeking out, processing, and utilizing self-relevant information in exploring their identities (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990; White, Wampler & Winn, 1998). College students with an informational style take a deliberate, problem-solving, and problem-focused approach to coping (Berzonsky, 1992) and tend to be open to new experiences (Duriez & Soenens, 2006). Adolescents with a normative identity style tend to be close-minded and conform easily to the beliefs of others (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990; White et al., 1998). They are concerned mainly with the desires and expectations of significant authority figures, defining themselves in terms of the norms and expectations that others set for them. They are less open to new experiences compared to those with an informational identity style (Duriez & Soenens, 2006). Individuals with a diffuse/avoidant style procrastinate, put off or avoid altogether the issues of identity (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990). They are reluctant to confront problems and make decisions (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990; White et al., 1998). Because these individuals are likely to avoid dealing with important identity relevant tasks, they often end up confused and uncertain about themselves (Duriez & Soenens, 2006).

Identity formation is a dynamic process of person–context interactions, and part of this context is parents, even in late adolescence. Several theories on parent–adolescent relationships share the idea that parents influence the process of identity formation (Beyers & Goossens, 2008). In other words, the dynamics of identity development and separation–individuation are integrated, and are based on the conceptualization of parents and children as two inter related identity systems (Koepke & Denissen, 2012).

The family has long been regarded as among the most interesting and influential interpersonal systems and nowhere is its influence on individual behaviours more profound than in the area of communicative behaviours (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; McLeod & Chaffee, 1972; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) have suggested that interactions within families may play a crucial role in the development of the ability to create and maintain future successful interpersonal relationships. Based on research by McLeod and Chaffee (1972), Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990) have conceptualized conversation and conformity orientations in families as central beliefs that determine much of how families communicate. The first belief, conversation orientation, is defined as the degree to which families create a climate where all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained interaction about a wide array of topics. In families on the high end of this dimension, family members freely, frequently, and spontaneously interact with each other without many limitations in regard to time spent in interaction and topics discussed. These families spend a lot of time interacting with each other and family members share their individual activities, thoughts, and feelings with family members. In these families, actions or activities that the family plans to engage in as a unit are discussed within the family, as family decisions. The other important belief regarding family communication is conformity orientation. Conformity orientation refers to the degree to which family communication stresses a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs. Families on the high end of this dimension are characterized by interactions that emphasize a uniformity of beliefs and attitudes. Their interactions typically focus on harmony, conflict avoidance, and the interdependence of family members. In inter-generational exchanges, communication in these families reflects obedience to parents and other adults.

A theoretical and empirical consensus seems to be emerging suggesting that the family context has an important influence on the adolescents' ability to successfully negotiate important developmental tasks such as ego identity development (Grotevant, 1987; Palladino & Blustein, 1994; Beyers & Goossens, 2008; Koepke & Denissen, 2012).

Bhushan and Shirali (1993) examined the relationship between identity achievement and family functioning among 411 male students (aged 18–24 yrs). Identity achievement was nonlinearly related to family cohesion and adaptability and was significantly positively related to openness, but negatively related to problems in communication.

Beyers & Goossens (2008) examined short-term changes in parenting and identity formation during late adolescence. Analyses using latent change models largely showed that parenting predicted the explorative phases of identity formation (i.e., exploration in breadth and commitment making), while evaluative phases of identity formation (i.e., exploration in depth and commitment identification) predicted more supportive parenting.

Smits et al. (2008) tested the relationships between crucial dimensions of perceived parenting (support, behavioral control, and psychological control) and identity styles among sample of middle and late adolescents

($n=674$). Results indicated that an information-oriented style was positively predicted by parental support. Contrary to expectations, however, an information-oriented style was also positively predicted by psychological control. A normative identity style was positively predicted by support and behavioral control. In line with expectations, a diffuse-avoidant identity style was positively predicted by psychological control and negatively by maternal (but not paternal) behavioral control.

Karimi (2010) examined the relationship between family functioning and identity styles among 250 students. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between family functions and identity styles, which means that the family functions have positive and direct relationship with informational and normative identity and negative and reversal relationship with confused-avoidant identity style. There was a significant and positive relationship between the family functioning and identity commitment.

Doumen et al. (2012) tested the associations between identity styles and the quality of relationships with peers (as indexed by friendship quality and loneliness) in a sample of 343 college students from Belgium. High scores for the information-oriented style were positively related to friendship quality, whereas high scores for the diffuse-avoidant identity style were positively related to loneliness.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The population in the current study consisted of college students in Shiraz Universities. 345 male students were selected with the average age of 21/05 ($\pm 2/02$), between 18-28 years, among the students of different collages of Shiraz University with simple random sampling. All of the participants completed the questionnaires.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Revised Family Communication Pattern (RFCP) instrument (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994).

We used the Farsi version of the Revised Family Communication Pattern (RFCP) instrument (Koroshnia & Latifian, 2008). The RFCP consists of 26 items and measures two dimensions of family communication: Conversation Orientation and Conformity Orientation. Conversation orientation is defined as a family climate where all family members are encouraged to participate freely in interactions about a wide array of topics. Conformity orientation is defined as a family climate that stresses homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs. The RFCP is based on McLeod and Chaffee's (1972) Family Communication Pattern Instrument. In order to calculate the internal consistency of the Scale, Koerner and Eis (2000) were used cronbach alpha coefficient, and the results indicated that alpha coefficient for conversation orientation was 0.89 and for the conformity orientation was 0.73. In the current investigation alpha coefficient for the conversation orientation was 0.87 and for conformity orientation was 0.86.

2.2.2. Identity Style Inventory (A Revision with a Sixth-Grade Reading Level)(White, Wampler & Winn, 1998).

The Berzonsky (1992) Identity Style Inventory (ISI) was revised by White, Wampler & Winn (1998) to a sixth-grade reading level for use with adolescents and adults with reading limitations. We used the Farsi version of the ISI-6G (Ghazanfari, 2004) in this study. This is a 40-item inventory that asks about the extent to which the respondent has made firm identity decisions and how the respondent approaches such issues. Statements are rated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The measure consists of four subscales, one for each of the three identity styles and a fourth that assesses the extent to which the respondent has made firm commitments to an identity. This scale was not used in assessing identity style, (White et al., 1998) and was not analyzed in this study. The informational, diffuse/avoidant, normative and commitment subscales consists of 11, 10, 9 & 10 items respectively. Participants received a score for each of these three identity styles. Internal consistency for all subscales has been calculated in a high level: alpha coefficient for normative style was 0.64, for information style was 0.59, and for diffuse-avoidant style was 0.78 (White et al., 1998). In the current investigation alpha coefficient for the normative, information, and diffuse-avoidant was 0.50, 0.63, and 0.61 respectively.

3. Results

The results have been presented in the following tables:

Table 1. Matrix of correlation between family communication patterns and identity styles in young males

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1-RFCP -Conversation orientation	34.78	10.50	-				
2- RFCP -Conformity orientation	17.77	8.78	-0.38**	-			
3-ISI-Normative style	29.45	4.38	0.35**	-0.07	-		
4-ISI-Informational style	39.91	5.10	0.24**	0.07	0.21**	-	
5-ISI-Diffuse-avoidant style	26.02	5.32	-0.13*	0.30**	0.01	-0.11*	-

** P < 0.01 * P < 0.05

Table 1 shows that family communication patterns were associated significantly with Identity Styles. Individuals, who show a conversation orientation in their family communication, were higher in information and normative styles positively, and lower in Diffuse-avoidant style in identity negatively. However, individuals who show a conformity orientation in their family communication were higher in Diffuse-avoidant style positively.

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis method to predict identity styles from males' family communication pattern

Variables		R	R ²	F	P	B	SEB	β
Dependent	Predictor							
ISI-Normative style	Stepwise Regression	0.35	0.12	24.77	0.001			
	Conversation orientation					0.15**	0.02	0.37
	Conformity orientation					0.03	0.02	0.07
ISI-Informational style	Stepwise Regression	0.30	0.09	16.97	0.001			
	Conversation orientation					0.15**	0.02	0.31
	Conformity orientation					0.04	0.03	0.09
ISI-Diffuse-avoidant style	Stepwise Regression	0.30	0.09	17.08	0.001			
	Conversation orientation					-0.01	0.02	-0.01
	Conformity orientation					0.17**	0.03	0.29

** P < 0.01

As indicated in table 2 the conversation orientation of communication pattern in family, predicts normative style positively ($R^2=12\%$) and informational style positively ($R^2=9\%$). The conformity orientation of communication pattern in family, predicts diffuse-avoidant style positively ($R^2=9\%$).

4. Discussion

In the current study the relation between family communication patterns and identity styles in young male students have been investigated. Results of multiple regression analysis indicated that identity styles in college students can be predicted by their family communication patterns. Individuals, who have a conversation orientation of communication pattern in family, more likely have normative and informational styles in identity. In identity styles, Daneshvarpoor and his coworkers (2008) indicated that in a plurality society the comparison between normative and informative individuals is possible just on the basis of similarities between them. Whereas, in individualism society, Berzonsky & Kuk (2005) indicated that the comparison between them is possible on the basis of focus on their differences. Therefore, it may be eventual in the Iranian society that two types of identity styles cover themselves. Then, an orientation of communication (conversation) can predict two types of identity in family. Obviously, this topic needs more independent researches. Also individuals, who have a conformity orientation of communication pattern in family, more likely have diffuse-avoidant style positively. They put off or avoid altogether issues of identity. Also they are reluctant to confront problems and make decisions (Berzonsky, 1989,

1990). This style in families with conformity orientation found that their interactions typically focus on harmony, conflict avoidance, and the interdependence of family members.

The results of the current study are consistent with some other investigations (e.g., Bhushan & Shirali, 1993; Beyers & Goossens, 2008; Smits et al., 2008; Karimi, 2010). Bhushan & Shirali (1993) discovered that identity achievement was related to family cohesion and openness, but negatively related to problems in communication. Beyers & Goossens (2008) discovered that parenting predicted the explorative phases of identity formation, while evaluative phases of identity formation predicted more supportive parenting. Results of Smits et al. (2008) investigation indicated that an information-oriented style was positively predicted by parental support and psychological control. Also a normative identity style was positively predicted by support and behavioral control. Karimi (2010) discovered that the family functions have positive and direct relationship with informational and normative identity, and negative and reversal relationship with confused-avoidant identity style. Investigators in the future can design an experimental design in which environmental prompting instigates the communication patterns in family, and study their consequences in the development or the escalation of identity styles.

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